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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Chicago School Reform Act of 1988 (CSRA); outlines work of the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance; and traces the Chicago School Reform (Illinois) movement, an effort to address more adequately the previously unmet needs of "at-risk" children by creating a systemic opportunity for schools to restructure. In the late 1980s, reform activists in Chicago, a school system mostly made of "at-risk" students who are unsuccessfully educated, abandoned the effort to add specialized programs in individual schools to meet the needs of "at-risk" students and focused on changing "at-risk" schools. The assumption among these reformers is that schools, which are seriously failing the city's students, must change, and it is inappropriate to blame students who fail. Halfway through the initial reform period (February 1992), the degree of organizational change is encouraging. Despite the chaos created by fiscal and administrative mismanagement by officials who were unwilling to accept their responsibility to change a failing school system, major CSRA elements have been successfully established. Local school councils have been established in every school and most function adequately. Principals have adopted new roles and are providing new leadership. Teachers have become increasingly involved and positive about reform. Resources have been increasingly focused on the schools, with the greatest increases in schools enrolling the highest proportions of disadvantaged students. However, few schools have entered into school-wide efforts to change the nature of classroom instruction. (Contains 23 references.) (RLC)

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Chicago School Reform:

A Response to Unmet Needs of "At Risk" Students

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CHICAGO PANEL ON PUBLIC SCHOOL POLICY AND FINANCE

All too frequently, the discussions of "at-risk" students proceed from the assumption that these students exist at the margins of the regular student enrollment. This is particularly the case, I have noticed, with scholars working from national data sets such as High School and Beyond. So Hammond and Howard (1986) suggest that black and Hispanic students (with survey reported dropout rates at an unbelievably low 17 and 19 percent, respectively) "display some rather interesting anomalies in their statistical behavior." They suggest that dropping out can best be understood as behavior at one end of the performance spectrum:

> At the other extreme are students whose performance suggests that they have essentially dropped out (or have been dropped out) of the academic process though they have remained in the school building. Still further to this side are students for whom school attendance is not only minimally productive, but even painful. For them dropping out is a rational response to an intolerable situation (Hammond & Howard, 1986: 55).

Such an analysis leads the authors into an individualized and psychologized definition of the problems of "at-risk" students and remedies that call for all

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teachers to have high expectations for black students.

Similarly, Wehlege and Rutter (1986: 381) describe dropouts as marginalized students who "do not expect to get as much schooling as their peers" who experience "conflict with and estrangement from institutional norms and rules." The authors propose a solution that is based on this presupposition that "at-risk" students are primarily marginal students on the edges of normal student bodies. They propose alternative schools within regular schools which can be more attentive to the special needs of "at-risk" students. These alternative schools would have a few teachers who work intensively with those who are "at-risk" in groupings of students which are small and mutually supportive. But how applicable are such approaches to the urban schools which many "at-risk" students attend?

At Chicago's Austin High School, where the longitudinal dropout rate for the Class of 1982 was 62.1 percent, only 18.4 percent of the entering ninth graders could read within a range which might be considered "normal" (above the 27th percentile nationally, or no more than two years below grade level; Hess & Lauber, 1985: 35). For the Class of 1985, the dropout rate increased to over 80 percent. In segregated urban schools like Austin, where 54.2 percent of the students are from low income families, or nearby Crane, where 73.2 percent are low income students, "at-risk" students are not on the margins of the student body. They *are* the student body. And it may be argued, these students are rejecting, in massive numbers, the structures and performance of contemporary urban schools as being inadequate to meet their needs.

It is for this reason that reform activists in Chicago abandoned the effort to

add specialized programs in individual schools to meet the needs of "at-risk" students and began to focus on the problem of changing "at-risk" schools. With the recent emphasis on accountability and vouchers, these schools may be more "at-risk" than reformers had understood during the movement to bring reform to the Chicago Public Schools. The Chicago reform activists were convinced that it was inappropriate to "blame the victims" and therefore sought to provide opportunities for schools to change to become more effective with low income students. It was out of this conviction that they persuaded the Illinois General Assembly to pass the Chicago School Reform Act of 1988.

Prevalence and Non-Success of At-Risk Students in the Chicago Public Schools

As Chicago reformers were mounting a legislative effort to foster extensive change, the data they were presenting showed a school system which was predominantly made up of "at-risk" students who were not being successfully educated. During the 1987-88 school year, 80.2 percent of all elementary school students qualified for a free or reduced price lunch. There were 96 elementary schools in which every student qualified and another 112 in which more than 90 percent did. Two-thirds of the system's primary and intermediate students attended schools in which at least 80 percent of the students were from low income homes. Only 32 of Chicago's 440 regular elementary schools had fewer than 30 percent of their students from low income backgrounds, and these schools were attended by fewer than five percent of the city's public elementary school students (Hess, 1992: 37). These statistics have not changed appreciably in the intervening years.

During the 1989-90 school year, the first under the reform act, using a

much more restrictive definition of poverty (combining AFDC, census, and free lunch data), there were 165,842 elementary students (42 percent of the elementary aged children) who qualified for Federal Chapter I support for disadvantaged students, but the funds were so limited that they were concentrated into only 288 of the city's 491 public elementary schools and served only 50,733 students, almost exclusively in pull-out programs. Despite the relaxation of federal regulations, only five Chicago elementary schools were permitted by the system's bureaucrats to use the funds for school-wide programs. Thus, most low income students in Chicago schools were not served by these federal funds at all, and the majority who were served had to experience the labelling effect of participating in a pull-out program which probably negated whatever benefit the program itself provided.

For years, special education programs in the Chicago Public Schools had been in chaos. This catastrophically mismanaged program was highlighted in the 1982 report of a sister organization, Designs For Change, entitled *Caught in the Web* (Moore & Radford-Hill, 1982). The authors charged that Chicago steered black students into Educationally Mentally Handicapped (EMH) classes at rates triple those of other major cities. They claimed that as many as 7,000 of the 12,000 EMH students were misclassified. More recent data indicate that as many as 4,000 Chicago students (one percent of the total enrollment) are tuitioned out to specialized schools or residential placement centers at a cost of more than $50 million a year.

As reform was beginning in Chicago, the system was a predominantly minority school system. Only 12.3 percent of the students were white; 59.6 percent were black; 25 percent were Hispanic, and 3.1 percent were Asian or Native

American (Chicago Panel, 1990). Just over nine percent were limited in their English proficiency. The Chicago Public Schools had had a long history of *de facto* segregation. Though the system had been legally desegregated in 1874, residential segregation, reinforced by Chicago Real Estate Board policy and restrictive covenants incorporated into property titles until as late as 1969, combined with the system's emphasis on neighborhood schools, led activists in the 1950s to claim that 91 percent of Chicago schools were attended by 90 percent or more of one race. However, it was not until 1980, when white enrollment had dropped to 18 percent, that the system entered into a consent decree with the U.S. Department of Justice to desegregate. At that time, nine of the city's high schools had more than 70 percent white students, enrolling 45 percent of all white high school students in the city. Only a quarter of white high school students attended schools where more than half of the enrollment was minority. By contrast, 85 percent of black high school students attended schools with fewer than 15 percent white students. At the elementary school level, there were 74 schools with more than 70 percent white enrollments, and 347 schools with fewer than 15 percent white students; these segregated elementary schools enrolled 93.1 percent of all black students and 58.2 percent of all Hispanic students (Hess & Warden, 1987).

Thus, students who might be considered "at risk" because they belonged to a racial or ethnic minority were generally isolated in schools primarily attended by other similar students. At the elementary school level, students in these racially isolated schools achieved at lower levels than did students attending schools with more white students. On the eighth grade Iowa Test of Basic Skills in 1985-86, the median grade-equivalent score for students in schools with at least 30 percent white

students was 8.5, three months below the national norm; the median for students in schools with less than 15 percent white students was 6.8, two full years below the normal grade level.

The implementation of the 1980 agreement eliminated the few remaining predominantly white schools in the system, but left the vast majority of minority students attending the more than 300 schools which were 100 percent minority in enrollment. The Chicago Panel's assessment of the effect of the desegregation program was that only four percent more minority students were attending schools in desegregated settings at the end of the decade than had been doing so before the desegregation agreement was signed (Hess & Warden, 1988). One of the primary mechanisms utilized in the desegregation plan was the dramatic expansion of magnet schools. The study showed that these schools were disproportionately funded and provided disproportionate benefits to white, middle-class students. Thus, despite increasing desegregation funding from $9.8 million in 1980-81 to $77.3 million in 1985-86, for the most part, minority students continued to attend schools in which "at risk" students were aggregated and were performing less successfully than were students attending the system's relatively few integrated schools. But, due to the small number of remaining white students, desegregation, as a school improvement strategy, had done about as much as it could do (Easton & Hess, 1990).

Economically disadvantaged and minority students in Chicago were not being successfully educated. In addition to the intolerably high dropout rates already mentioned, Chicago students were scoring badly on every form of standardized measure being reported. But, as noted in the Panel's initial dropout

study, the most disadvantaged students were shunted into one set of schools while the most successful were "drawn" into another set of schools in a system of "educational triage" (Hess, 1986). Students with the best elementary school preparation were enrolled in one set of high schools, while those with the worst scores were shunted to neighborhood schools, predominantly in low income inner city neighborhoods. Overage students were funnelled into the worst schools, and prevented from attending the more selective high schools. The best schools were more than a third white in enrollment, while the worst enrolled only six percent white students, and most of those students were in four of the 21 schools. The percentage of low income pupils was twice as high in the worst schools as in the best.

High School Characteristics and Dropout Rates

	Percent White	Percent Low Income	Percent Below Normal	Percent Overage	Percent Dropouts
Lowest D/O Rates	33.5%	28.3%	27.8%	13.3%	25.2%
Middle D/O Rates	27.7%	34.4%	58.2%	26.7%	45.2%
Highest D/O Rates	5.9%	51.9%	69.9%	34.5%	55.8%

This means that half of all low income high school students and half of all students entering high school overage (which usually means they were retained in grade at least once in elementary school) and 45 percent of all black and 49 percent of all Hispanic students were shunted into neglected schools which then lost more

than half of their students before graduation. The aggregate dropout rate for these schools was 55.8 percent, and none of them graduated as many students as dropped out. On the other hand, half of all white students were enrolled in selective high schools or those which enrolled few minorities or low income students. These selective or exclusive schools, in aggregate, had dropout rates below the national average and less than half of the neighborhood "dumping ground" schools. The triage assignment of students created great disparities in school success at the high school level.

While one Chicago high school was at the 78th percentile on ACT (American College Test) scores, 31 were in the first (lowest) percentile. Only six of 58 Chicago high schools ranked at the tenth percentile or higher (Chicago Panel, 1990: 33-35). The story was similar on other measures and nearly as dismal in the elementary schools as in the high schools.

When we studied elementary schools (Hess & Greer, 1987), we discovered that 20 percent of these schools enrolled nearly two-thirds (63.1%) of all white eighth graders; in these schools, only 11.4 percent of the students were from low income families. In aggregate, only 18 percent of these elementary school graduates started high school reading at below normal rates and only 19 percent eventually dropped out. These schools tended to be smaller than most schools in the system and they had more experienced faculties. By and large, they sent their students to the system's selective and exclusive high schools. Students in the other 80 percent of Chicago elementary schools included few (13.5%) white students and generally a third to half their students were from low income backgrounds. When we tracked the sending patters from elementary schools to high schools, we found

these schools dividing their graduates, sending the more successful to the selective and exclusive high schools, and the less successful to high schools in their own neighborhoods. Needless to say, dropout rates for students sent to the selective and exclusive schools were generally twenty percentage points lower than for students sent to inner city neighborhood high schools.

The school system was failing its students, most of whom were "at risk" when they entered the system. It tended to aggregate the most "at risk" students in "at risk" elementary schools, sorting out the most successful to enroll in more selective or exclusive high schools. It left the rest to attend more neglected inner city neighborhood high schools. To compound this problem, it focused its resources on schools with fewer "at risk" students in attendance.

Federal compensatory funds were concentrated in schools which were overwhelmingly attended by low income students, but their effects were undercut by lower levels of basic resources provided to those schools. State compensatory funds were blatantly diverted to provide bureaucratic overhead. The Chicago Panel's research showed that basic funding to elementary schools with 90-99 percent low income students was nearly $400 less per pupil than that provided to schools with 100 percent low income students *and* to those with fewer than 30 percent low income students, despite the fact that nearly a third of the system's students attended these 90-99 percent low income schools. Base level funding was $600 per pupil lower than at the more affluent schools (Hess, 1992: 34; see preceding graph). This lower spending at the schools with more low income students, in part, reflected the fact that these schools also were staffed with the most inexperienced teachers (Hess & Greer, 1987).

If one begins to define "at risk" as referring to students who come from economically disadvantaged families and adds to that being from minority families that are racially isolated, and then includes academic preparation, it is clear that such students are disproportionately enrolled in inner city and rural school systems. Within urban systems, such students frequently are further isolated in inner city neighborhood elementary schools; they are less prevalent or under represented in selective schools and in schools in more exclusive neighborhoods. Such is the case in Chicago.

What emerged to Chicago activists was the picture of *a school system* which was "at risk." It was a school system in which most of its students started school at a disadvantage and remained in that condition throughout their school years. The system's resources, however, were husbanded for those students who showed the most promise. These students were steered into a few well performing schools which were provided with the most experienced teachers and frequently were provided extra resources. Those individual students who had overcome the risks, who had battled *Against the Odds* (Hess, *et al.*, 1989) to maintain good attendance and achieve good grades from their teachers, were steered into the system's better high schools. Meanwhile, most "at-risk" kids were concentrated in "holding pens" until they reached an age when they could officially drop out. Many had unofficially dropped out years before. If the facts were equally available, I suspect many other large urban systems could be similarly assessed.

Following the Panel's publication of several of its dropout studies, it convened a symposium of university scholars and leaders from the city's non-profit, school support agencies to examine solutions to the dropout problem. This

symposium quickly dismissed the *ad hoc* proposals that treated potential dropouts as marginalized students. It adopted a sociological, rather than psychological, perspective to address student failure. The members built a matrix of student needs and potential solutions which covered all years from infancy to age 18 and included both hours in school and out of school. It was agreed that a comprehensive approach would be needed. Otherwise, students could be expected to continue making what were apparently "rational" decisions to drop out of school: if one was unprepared for high school level work when one graduated from eighth grade and had been unable to accumulate any course credits during the first two years in high school, dropping out would seem more rational than investing another four years in the current school system. However, these dropouts could now be blamed for future life failures because they did not make it through a system which was stacked against them.

Chicago reformers decided it was the system which had neglected and stacked the odds against "at risk" kids. Primarily, it was the system that was failing the kids, rather than the kids who were failing in the system. Such a conclusion was incomprehensible to school system administrators, who are more comfortable with psychological explanations of the failures of individual students. When the Panel described the ways in which Chicago high schools regularly shortchanged their students through 20 percent shorter subject periods, chaotic classrooms, and phantom study halls (Hess, *et al.*, 1986), the school superintendent's only response was that the Panel was trying to "trash" the school system. When asked by the news media why the system could not do better by its students, he could only respond by blaming the number of low income students in the system (*Chicago*

Tribune, 1987). Refusing to only blame the victims, Chicagoans set out to reform the school system.

Fix the System Instead of Fixing the Kids

The response of educational activists was an attempt to reform the entire Chicago Public Schools system. Aided by a 19 day school strike which mobilized massive political pressure, reform activists were able to persuade Illinois legislators to enact a thorough-going reform bill (P.A. 85-1418).[1] The Chicago School Reform Act had three major components. The first was a set of ten goals which can be summarized as requiring the Chicago Public Schools to lift the achievement levels of their students to match the national norms. While many of the reform activists recognized the near impossibility of achieving these goals within the initial five year time frame of the legislation, they were committed to putting such high expectations before schools in the hopes that school faculties would adopt similarly high expectations of their students. These goals were expressive of the educational philosophy which was held by the more thoughtful reform advocates which was rooted in the research literature on effective schools. Based upon earlier research that had identified a set of characteristics which were present in "effective schools" (Edmonds, 1979; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Purkey & Smith, 1983), provisions in the legislation were designed to provide the opportunity and to foster the efforts of schools to change so as to embody these more successful characteristics.

The second component in the legislation is frequently overlooked in accounts of the Chicago reform act but is seen, in Chicago, as the engine which

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1 See Hess (1991) for a fuller description of the effort that led to the passage of the Chicago School Reform Act and for additional details on its components and early implementation.

drives much of the improvement effort. The act requires that the resources of the school system be reallocated to be focused on the students with the greatest needs. That reallocation is accomplished by two mechanisms. A limit was placed on the proportion of non-instructional expenses within the school system so that that proportion cannot exceed the average proportion of such expenses in all other school systems in the state. This provision forced a reallocation of about $40 million in the first year of reform, resulting in the elimination of about 500 positions in the bureaucracy's central and district administrative units and the granting of an average of $90,000 in new discretionary funds at the elementary school level. The second mechanism was the requirement that all schools receive equitable base level funding, with categorical grants and state compensatory funding added on the basis of the number of qualifying students. The reallocation of the State Chapter I compensatory funds, which amounted to about $250 million in the initial year of reform implementation, would be phased in over four years and these funds would become progressively discretionary at the decision of school leaders over five years.

The third component of the reform act is the best known, the establishment of school based management in the form of elected Local School Councils (LSCs) at each school site. These councils were given three basic responsibilities: to create a school improvement plan; to adopt a school spending plan; and to select the principal to lead the school on a four year performance contract. The school improvement plan was to be drafted by the principal with significant input from an advisory teacher committee (the Professional Personnel Advisory Committee, PPAC), from the council itself, and from the community. The improvement plan

was to be built on the basis of a needs assessment of the school's students, its facilities, and its educational program. Through the school improvement plan, local schools were being given the opportunity to shape their curriculum in diverse ways to meet the particular needs of their enrolled students. The school budget was then to be shaped to support the components of the improvement plan. LSCs were given the opportunity to add or delete positions, shift the focus of program resources, or add programs as required by the improvement plan, subject to existing laws and union contracts. While these limitations were very significant, the legislation provided for a mechanism for LSCs to gain waivers of contract provisions or Board regulations. This mechanism was mirrored in the next contract signed between the Chicago Board of Education and the Chicago Teachers Union, and union leaders claim they have granted every legitimate request for waivers which they have received.

Local School Councils were also given the right to select a principal to provide educational leadership to their schools. Since about 1970, Chicago schools had been able to recommend their choice of a new principal to the General Superintendent when a vacancy occurred. In most cases, their choice was appointed to the school. But once chosen, the principal then had life-time tenure, usually in that same school, if he or she desired. The reform act eliminated principal tenure, substituting a four year performance contract for the principal. All existing principals were deemed to be completing such contracts and half the councils would be able to select a new principal, if they so desired, during the first year of implementation, with the second half choosing in the second year. The significant new power granted LSCs was the ability to terminate a principal an LSC

thought was no longer being effective.

There were several other important provisions of the reform act. Principals were given the right to select educational staff for newly open positions (either through a vacancy in an existing position or for newly created positions) on the basis of merit. Teachers would no longer be assigned to schools on the basis of seniority, with the consequent "bumping" of teachers that the prior seniority assignment system had fostered. Accompanying this new assignment pattern, the teacher remediation and termination procedures were shortened from the year-long remediation period adopted in statewide reforms in 1985 to a 50 day remediation period. Again, these provisions were ratified in the ensuing contract with the teachers union.

Finally, a procedure was established for the identification of schools in which school improvement plans were not adopted or in which the plans were not being adequately implemented. Frequently referred to as the "bankruptcy" provision for non-performing schools, this provision allowed a sub-district superintendent (with the agreement of a district council made up of one representative from each school council) to place a non-performing school in remediation for a year, and to provide it with direct assistance and guidance. If the school still did not improve in its efforts, again with the agreement of the district council, the sub-district superintendent could recommend more drastic steps to the Board of Education ranging from new Local School Council elections to removal of the principal, or replacing the entire faculty, or closure of the school. This bankruptcy provision would only become applicable after schools had had three years to attempt to improve themselves.

A Midway Report on Chicago School Reform

At the end of February of 1992, the Chicago Panel issued *A Midway Report* on the implementation of the Chicago School Reform Act (Hess, 1992). The act had envisioned an initial implementation period of five years, beginning with the initial LSC elections in October of 1989. The report presented an assessment of progress after two and one-half years.

The report noted that it is still much too early to assess student achievement changes. The reform effort had been in operation for two and one-half years. The first year was a planning year in which Local School Councils were elected and did their initial needs assessments, built their first school improvement plans and adopted their first budgets. Half of the schools evaluated their incumbent principals and selected their leadership for the ensuing four years. During the second year of implementation, LSCs first began to put their newly adopted improvement plans into operation, and the second set of principals were selected that spring. The most recent student achievement tests had been taken in April of that second year, during the eighth month of initial improvement plan implementation. Even in the schools where radical change was planned, eight months would be far too short a period to expect significant impact on achievement scores. In a recent study, the Chicago Panel had shown that, on the basis of second, third, and fourth grade teacher-assigned academic grades and attendance records, we could predict with nearly 90 percent accuracy which students would eventually graduate from high school and which would become dropouts (Hess, *et al.*, 1989). Thus, early experiences with schools have powerful influences on students' later school performance. It would be naive to think that a few months of even radical innovation would be able to

change basic student achievement patterns. It will take long and sustained efforts at the school level to bring significant changes in student achievement. Most schools were still at a very initiatory level of effort.

The data collected during the first three years of reform indicated little change in the student behavior and performance pattern. Test scores from the second year of reform implementation showed no significant pattern of change. On the Illinois Goals Assessment Program tests for 1990-91, 77 percent of all elementary schools fell below state averages; for 11th grade reading and math, 92 percent were below the state average. Dropout rates, largely responsive to earlier student experiences of neglect in the city's schools, continued to be discouraging. Dropout rates, which during most of the 1980s were hovering between 40 and 45 percent, jumped to 48 percent in 1989 and then declined slightly for the Class of 1990 to 46 percent. Data for the Class of 1991 were not yet available when the report was issued in February of 1992. Attendance data for the system's elementary schools showed very little change; at the high school level, the data showed a continuing pattern of decline over the last six years, due in part to more stringent record keeping procedures enforced by the state as a result of the Panel's 1986 dropout study (Hess, *et al.*, 1986); these new procedures translate cut classes into half-day absences. Some individual schools have shown improvement in attendance, but citywide little progress has been made.

The Chicago Panel will continue to monitor student achievement and behavior on a series of measures throughout the reform effort. The study will examine individual student achievement gains from year to year and compare those gains with previous achievement gains for these students to see if there are

increases or decreases in the yearly gains for each student in the system. This study has been complicated by the Chicago Board's decision to use different forms of its standardized tests to increase test integrity during the reform implementation years. In order to compare scores, the Panel has been forced to mount annual equating studies, with the cooperation of the Board's evaluation staff and a number of volunteer schools. The pattern of individual student increases and decreases will be aggregated to the school level and correlated with data on each school's improvement efforts: program changes, staffing changes, changes in resource allocation, and school responses on surveys of teachers and principals. In future reports, the Panel will seek to provide some assessment of which improvement efforts are associated with improved student achievement.

On the basis of systemwide data and an intensive study in 14 representative schools, the Panel's *Midway Report* came to two major findings: first, that organizationally the major elements of reform have all been put into place and are functioning relatively adequately; second, that the number of schools which have entered into school-wide efforts to change the nature of classroom instruction is still quite low.

The amount of organizational change which has happened in this $2.5 billion operation is quite astounding. The report listed four dimensions of organizational change which were noteworthy. **First, Local School Councils have been established in every school and, for the most part, function adequately.** LSCs were first elected in October 1989 and then re-elected in October of 1991, with about 45 percent of first term members re-elected for a second term on the same LSC. Since the children of some parent members had

graduated from those schools, disqualifying these parents from further LSC membership, this continuation rate seems appropriate. Despite initial chaos about where LSCs would meet and what immediate duties they had to perform, most LSCs successfully completed their major responsibilities: adopting a school improvement plan and enacting a school budget for the ensuing year. All councils, during their first two-year terms, evaluated their principals and selected a person to serve in that position for the next four years. At 38 percent of the schools, a different person was installed as principal than had been providing leadership when the reform act was signed in December of 1988.

LSC attendance varied from school to school, but overall averaged about 70 percent, with principals attending most frequently. LSC chairs and teacher representatives had attendance rates over 80 percent, while rates for community representatives and parent members other than the chairs were nearer 60 percent. Although LSCs spent nearly a third of their agendas on organizational matters, they also devoted a third of their topics to dimensions of the school program. Building, finance, and personnel (primarily principal selection) items dominated the remainder of their discussions.

Second, principals have adopted new roles and are providing new leadership. As already noted, by the third year of reform implementation, 38 percent of Chicago schools were led by a principal who had not been in that position when reform began. A similar percentage of schools in the Panel's intensive study were being served by new principals. The selection process went smoothly in some schools, but others had a more difficult time in keeping their incumbent evaluation process objective and separate from the launching of a search

for a new candidate. In some schools, the principal selection process so dominated council agendas that they could not adequately conduct other business such as revising their improvement plans or adopting a school budget. The *Midway Report* described the selection process in three schools which represent the range of experiences schools encountered.

Principals during the initial years of reform found that time demands were excessive. They found themselves playing new roles, not all of which seemed appropriate to them. One participating principal complained that she now had to be a PR figure, a referee between factions in her school, and a glorified clerk making lots of reports. The extra work occasioned by interacting with the LSC had opportunity costs for principals in staff supervision and other program leadership. But some principals also saw the reform effort as providing more opportunities, particularly relative to staff selection and to the additional support they receive from more involved LSC members, parents, and teachers.

At the end of the third year of reform implementation, a survey of principals was conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (1992). About 83 percent of the system's 550 principals responded to the survey. Generally, principals then serving in the system were optimistic about the prospects of school reform. One set of questions focused on their relationships with the central administration. While the central administration no longer exercised direct line supervision of most matters affecting local schools, it was expected to provide significant support for schools. For 13 separate arenas ranging from school budgeting, through curriculum and instruction issues, to capital improvements, principal dissatisfaction was relatively low for most items. Generally, central office

assistance was deemed to be not helpful or not timely by between 10 and 20 percent of the principals. The exceptions to this rule were for school maintenance and capital improvement issues, where dissatisfaction was expressed by about 50 percent of the principals. More information about principal perceptions of reform will be forthcoming when the entire survey of all city principals is released by the Consortium in late 1992.

Third, teachers have become increasingly involved and positive about reform. Based on two surveys and interviews with a series of key school-level teacher leaders, it appears that teachers may now be quite active in reform efforts at most schools. A small survey taken before the first LSC elections (Chicago Panel, 1989) showed that teachers did not then see themselves becoming extensively involved in reform. They thought increased parent involvement was the primary strength of the reform effort, but worried that such involvement might lead to greater classroom interference. A much more comprehensive survey of 13,000 elementary school teachers, taken in the spring of 1991 (Easton, *et al.*, 1991), showed a majority of teachers responded positively to questions about school reform. In 62 schools, teachers were very positive about reform, while in another 241 they were moderately positive. In 89 schools, teachers were somewhat negative, while in 9 schools, they were very negative. Most teachers felt they were fairly represented on LSCs, that they had increased involvement in policy making, and they were involved in implementing their school improvement plans. Interviews in the 14 study schools indicated that teachers had a major role in determining their schools' improvement plan, which was generally accepted as proposed by the LSC. Although the survey indicated teachers were mildly

optimistic that their schools will improve, fewer than half indicated their own instructional practices had changed or would change in the future.

Fourth, resources have been increasingly focused on the schools, with the greatest increases in schools enrolling the highest proportions of disadvantaged students. Between the 1988-89 school year, when the reform law was being enacted, and 1991-92, the Chicago Public Schools increased revenues by $403 million, mostly from increased local property tax receipts (state aid increased by only $25 million). Most of these new revenues were reallocated to schools (primarily through changes in the distribution of State Chapter I compensatory funds). Some 840 administrative unit positions were eliminated to meet the cap on non-instructional expenses and the pressures of budget balancing. At the same time, school staff have increased by 3,365. In half of these positions, schools hired classroom aides; schools also added just over 1,000 teachers and other professional staff. Funds have been much more equitably allocated to schools. In the year before school reform began, elementary schools with 90 to 99 percent low income students averaged $400 less per pupil in expenditures than did schools with fewer than 30 percent low income students. In 1991-92, the schools with the heaviest concentrations of low income students had nearly $1,000 more per pupil than did those with the fewest disadvantaged pupils. The average elementary school had $340,000 in supplemental discretionary funds. Supplemental funds in the average high school amounted to $478,000. Thus, disadvantaged students have far better access to additional educational resources under reform than they did previously.

The amount of institutional change which has occurred in the Chicago Public Schools in just two and one-half years is quite amazing. Few other $2.5

billion organizations have undergone such rapid and far-ranging change. But the point of the Chicago School Reform Act was not just to change an institution. It was to help low achieving students, particularly low income disadvantaged students, to become more active and successful learners. For this to happen, significant instructional change must also occur. There are encouraging signs of this instructional change in some Chicago schools, but there is much yet to be done in this arena. There are two major findings in this arena.

In one of the more exciting by-products of the Chicago reform effort, the Panel found that **national school improvement efforts have "marched on Chicago" to assist many schools.** Whereas in 1988, few national school improvement efforts were working in any Chicago schools, by 1992, there were a wide variety of reformers from across the nation who had formed links to assist more than 170 Chicago schools. The Chicago Panel has been chronicling the activities of a number of these efforts through its monthly newsletter, *Reform Report.* Some of these projects have a distinctly Chicago flavor (Mortimer Adler's Paideia program, the Illinois Writing Project, and the federally supported desegregation program, Project CANAL, which has provided school improvement planning training to about 70 racially isolated schools). Other projects are products of major school reformers such as Ted Sizer (Coalition of Essential Schools), Henry Levin (Accelerated Schools Network), and James Comer (Comer School Development Program). More than 60 elementary schools have been trained in the principles of New Zealand's Reading Recovery program. These national and international efforts are providing valuable resources to schools and school staffs as they work to improve Chicago's schools. Many are supported by grants from

Chicago's major foundations and corporations, who continue to support the reform effort. These outside reform resources were largely unavailable to the city's schools prior to school reform.

But for all of this outside encouragement, only a minority of Chicago schools have yet brought radical change to their instructional programs. **School Improvement Plans have focused more on "add-ons" than on altering the regular instructional programs of schools.** In the first year of school improvement planning, most schools focused on solving practical problems like overcrowding, discipline in the school, controlling gangs, and increasing attendance. About a quarter of the observed schools planned quite significant changes in their instructional programs while another quarter approved very rudimentary plans. An analysis of the revised plans adopted in the second year showed curricular changes were most prevalent, pedagogical improvements next most frequent, with organizational and other changes following. About a quarter of the studied schools were attempting changes which would impact regular classroom instruction throughout the school, while another quarter were planning changes in some classrooms. More frequently, schools were favoring "add-on" programs such as additional classes (art, music, science or computer labs) and additional instruction (after-school, pre-school, full-day kindergarten, or summer school). Most add-ons can be implemented easily if money and new staff are available.

Initiatives that may affect the regular classroom experiences of students require significant commitment and time on the part of teachers. One school is emblematic of efforts to change regular classroom instruction. It is implementing:

a literature-based reading program; extensive use of hands-on learning in mathematics; an experimental approach to science; an innovative school wide writing program; and Socratic seminars in an attempt to improve the content and intellectual level of classroom discussion.

As we tried to track significant changes in the instructional programs of schools we were studying (Flinspach & Ryan, 1992), we discovered that the extent of implementation which occurred frequently reflected the type of planning which had been undertaken. While teachers have been engaged in school planning from the beginning of the reform effort, school level leaders indicated that teacher involvement was becoming more extensive as their confidence grew that their suggestions would be heard, would have the support of their principals, and would receive adequate funding in local school budgets. But not all schools were equally effective in their planning.

As we assessed the evaluation of the School Improvement Plans (SIPs) operative during 1991-92, it became obvious that in a third of our schools, the formally adopted SIP had little effect on the regular, daily life of the school. In these schools, the SIP was rarely discussed by anyone; teachers were unaware of its contents; principals could not find a copy of the plan. In most cases, these plans were not realistically related to the life of the school. In another third of the schools, plans were occasionally discussed, but not a regular part of the life of the school. In a third of the schools, the SIP played a much more vital role; it was regularly discussed in Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (PPAC) meetings and teachers were actively engaged in revising the plan for 1992-93 implementation. We labelled the unrealistic plans the result of "symbolic planning," planning that

was characterized by vague or generalized descriptions of existing practice, initiatives that sound good but are unlikely to be implemented, or goal statements without implementing activities or programs. By contrast, where plans were having an important effect, they were much more pragmatic. In schools with pragmatic plans, frequently the persons expected to implement plan components had had a major hand in the planning process and were willing to be accountable for the plan's implementation.

In the three schools we have been studying more intensively, because their plans were more focused on instructional change than were the plans of other schools in our sample, we found the planning to be characterized by pragmatic approaches. A brief description of the planning process in two schools may make this distinction clearer.

At a school we are calling Montgomery Elementary, the incumbent principal, obeying the mandate, though not the spirit, of the reform law drew up the first School Improvement Plan by himself. The plan included vague initiatives and perfunctory descriptions of routine operations such as "monitor instruction and pupil progress" and "organize school for instruction next year." He also included items that "sound good" but were not meant to be implemented, such as "utilize computers and calculators in the instructional program" (though none were made available to teachers) and "evaluate pupil progress in all subject areas and adjust instruction to meet individual pupil needs as is necessary." His real attitude towards reform, however, was revealed in this passage from the plan:

> School reform is a paper intensive, meeting oriented, time consuming effort that diminished the energy and creative talents of

> the staff and parents who are sincerely attempting to meet the demands placed upon them. If legislative mandates are all that is needed to correct social conditions and shortcomings there would be no problems with drugs, crime, poverty or the myriad other problems facing society.

Thus, this principal was rejecting the notion that mandated changes in school organization and governance could provide a better answer for "at risk" kids. He observed the newly mandated actions required of him, but communicated his disdain for the approach. Needless to say, little changed as a result of the plan he proposed to the LSC.

During the following year (1990-91), the Montgomery LSC was charged to evaluate the principal and decide upon his retention or replacement. It was decided to not retain the incumbent. Two days before the second year SIP had to be adopted, a new principal began her tenure. The outgoing principal had prepared the second year SIP in the same way he had the first. Too late to completely change the process, the new principal added three of her own initiatives, in response to concerns expressed by staff and parents: hiring another teacher to extend the kindergarten classes to a full day program; devising an after school program; and hiring a security guard. These three very practical initiatives, characterized above as "add-on" planning, were instituted at the beginning of the 1991-92 school year; the rest of the SIP was ignored as irrelevant.

During the third year of reform, these new initiatives were seen to be significant improvements in the life of Montgomery School. The full day kindergarten was seen to be beneficial, as was the after school program. The new

security guard relieved the feelings of "unsafety" which had pervaded the school previously. More importantly, the man hired, a moon-lighting Chicago policeman, saw his job not only as providing a sense of security in the school, but also as an advisor to students; he was actively engaged in the effort to improve Montgomery, interacted regularly with the principal, and was very responsive to requests for assistance from individual teachers. These add-on initiatives had created a climate under which more fundamental change could be undertaken.

Not surprisingly, when the new principal began the planning process for the SIP to be adopted in the spring of 1992, teachers were much more willing to participate. The principal chaired the ten week process of developing the plan. She reviewed the record of student achievement in the school and the systemwide goals and objectives of reform adopted by the Board of Education. She gave a list of suggestions, but solicited input from the faculty members. The final plan presented to the Local School Council was prioritized to reflect the new funds available in the next year's school budget and was focused on the five subject areas included in the system's guide to improvement planning. It was full of very practical plans, each building upon existing programs and capacities. We have called this type of planning *pragmatic incremental planning*. In our opinion, it represents the first level of realistic planning for school improvement.

Further along in the improvement planning process is a school we are calling Winkle Elementary. During the first three years of school reform, Winkle had introduced many new initiatives, implementing Socratic seminars to improve the intellectual content of classroom discussion, shifting to a literature-based reading program, beginning extensive use of hands-on learning in mathematics,

focusing on experiments in science, and utilizing the Illinois Writing Project to implement a schoolwide writing emphasis. Teacher involvement in the planning process had been high in 1991-92; they accepted the idea that they were accountable for plan implementation; they had undertaken numerous incremental improvements and had moved on to more *thematic improvements* (Cf., Louis & Miles, 1990) with shifts in the means of instruction of writing, math, and science. Winkle was doing the kind of instructional improvement planning we hoped other schools would emulate.

During the 1991-92 school year, with teachers struggling to incorporate the many changes they were already undertaking, the principal decided it was time to shift the focus of improvement planning from staff development to student development. This was part of her vision of a renewed partnership between staff, students, and parents at Winkle Elementary that had guided the integrated SIP adopted in the spring of 1991. In an effort to make upper-grade students "...responsible for what they produce in school," the principal proposed establishing stiff minimum eighth grade graduation requirements, combined with a revamping of the seventh and eighth grade ("junior high") into an ungraded, project-oriented, portfolio-assessed school within the larger school. While the teachers claim they have accepted the vision put forward by the principal, they watered down the radical changes incorporated in the principal's original proposal, retaining the grade structure and reducing the project structure to projects already included in this year's planning. By utilizing incremental planning, rather than a more *directed planning* that would seek to put a more radical implementation of the professedly agreed upon vision of student responsibility into place, the teachers slowed the amount of

instructional change to a pace with which they were more comfortable. The principal, recognizing the importance of staff consensus in the planning process to engender staff accountability, agreed to the compromise on the implementation plan for the 1992-93 school year.

Out of the experiences of these schools we have been studying intensely, Panel staff have devised a model of school improvement planning, drawing significantly upon the work of Louis and Miles. On one side is the *symbolic planning* which is largely disconnected from reality, whether due to generalized statements, abstract goals without implementing plans, or "sound good" initiatives disconnected from the school's realities. In our sample of schools, few results could be found from School Improvement Plans characterized by symbolic planning. On the other side are plans characterized by *pragmatic planning*. These plans frequently were begun with *incremental changes* building on currently existing school efforts. They progressed to *thematic changes* which integrated some incremental plans. The fullest development of this pragmatic planning is an integrated SIP which is built upon a shared vision which emerged from the previous improvement planning efforts of the school community. Planning which is instituted and designed to carry out this vision, we are calling *directed planning*. To date, only four of the 14 schools we are studying are seriously engaged in pragmatic planning about the instructional program of the school. Only one of these four has reached the point of having a shared vision and it is the only one which has yet attempted directed planning. But, if school reform is to be effective in Chicago, more of the system's 540 schools must be about the job of directed planning to improve the instructional program for all of the city's students, and

particularly for its students who are "at risk."

Chicago: A Systemic Attempt to Address At-Risk Student Needs

In far too many settings across the United States, "at-risk" students attend schools which are themselves at risk of failing their enrolled students. While these "at-risk" students may not come to school with all of the advantages of their more affluent students, at least in terms of the behavior characteristics which schools currently value and reward, they bring other strengths and maturities which frequently are ignored or devalued by school staffs trying to emulate their more "successful" neighbors located in more affluent communities. Instead of emphasizing the strengths their students bring to school and adapting their programs to successfully guide these students in the learning enterprise, these "at-risk" schools too frequently try to force their students to abandon the characteristics which make them successful on the streets of their own communities and to adopt those other behaviors schools have traditionally rewarded. Without examining their own assumptions about what will make young people successful, they continue to emphasize the behaviors characteristic of a manufacturing century in an economy increasingly focused on information and service. In this context, it is at least reasonable to raise the question as to whether it is the students or the schools which are most "at-risk" of failure. The assumption, at least among reformers in Chicago, is that *it is our schools which are more seriously failing our city's students*, rather than blaming the students who are failing in our schools. If our schools are unwilling to build on the strengths our students bring with them or are unable to restructure themselves to better meet our students' needs, then it is the schools, even more than the kids, which must be changed.

The Chicago School Reform movement is an effort to address more adequately the previously unmet needs of "at-risk" kids by creating a systemic opportunity for schools to restructure. Halfway through the initial reform period, the degree of organizational change is quite encouraging. Despite the chaos created by fiscal and administrative mismanagement by officials who were unwilling to accept their responsibility to change a failing system, the major elements of the Chicago School Reform Act have been successfully established. Local School Councils are functioning in almost every Chicago school. Nearly 12,000 people are present during local discussions of school concerns each month of the school year. In some schools, important efforts are underway to change the way in which instruction is carried on in regular classrooms. In other schools, important practical problems have been addressed and new programs have been added to meet the special needs of some students. In some schools, little of significance has occurred. If student achievement is to improve measurably, more schools must turn their attention to changing the ways in which regular students and teachers interact in the majority of the city's classrooms.

The Chicago School Reform Act embodies a very different philosophy of meeting the needs of "at-risk" students. It is a grand experiment in attempting to force schools to change to meet the needs of their students rather than assuming it is the students who must change to conform to the expectations of schools, schools that were originally created to produce citizens for a manufacturing age. It is still too early to tell whether this experiment will be successful. At the midway point, it is encouraging that so much organizational change has occurred. But much must be done to embody a similar amount of change in the instructional programs of the

city's schools.

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